

Do You Really Want Your Medical Records Stored in the Cloud?

September 17, 2014 - Cloud computing has become all the rage. For the indoctrinated, cloud computing allows corporations to store information on a third party's computers. Companies will tell you that cloud computing provides them with a number of advantages. These include lower costs for computer equipment, the ability to back up their data to off-site computers (this is extremely important for disaster recovery) and with large corporations, reduced real estate costs associated with computing facilities. All of this is great for the companies that use it. And it can offer some advantages for consumers too, such as reduced cost for goods and services. But those consumer advantages have the potential for rapid evaporation when companies use cloud computing to store your personally identifiable information. That's why it is troubling to know that some very large corporations are actively lobbying congress to relax HIPAA privacy standards for cloud computing.

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HIPAA privacy standards are very strict. And companies that violate those standards can find themselves facing massive fines and other civil penalties. So far, the standards have largely prevented healthcare companies from outsourcing their computer storage requirements to third party cloud computing companies.

But a number of large corporations are trying to get congress to change HIPAA rules; making them more lenient. They argue that the risk of inadvertent disclosure of your personal information is outweighed by the benefits of cloud computing. Amazon is one of those companies.

The lobbying effort appears to be gaining some ground. Rep. Fred Upton (R-Mich) was quoted in CQ Roll Call as saying, "We have heard on numerous occasions that there is a wealth of health data available, but there are barriers to using it. We are exploring opportunities to break down those barriers, allowing for greater innovation and advancement, all the

while protecting the privacy of our patients."

Unfortunately, Rep. Upton's quest is probably not possible. By its very nature, using cloud computing to store medical information would create vast databases of consumer information that would be directly tied to the internet. Those databases will absolutely be targeted by hackers. Given the fact that there have been multiple reports of large data breaches of healthcare related data over the past thirty days, this point is indisputable.

ACCESS is against relaxing HIPAA standards for any reason. It should be left to individual consumers as to whether or not they want their personal data stored in the cloud, and not up to their healthcare providers. There is only one problem with that. Numerous polls show that consumers favor their own medical privacy a lot more than the companies serving them do.

If you are concerned about this yourself, you should write your congressman and senators. The only way to stop this effort is for consumers to become involved.

byJim Malmberg

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